

IMD 520
Experimental Media and Performance

Instructor: Nate Aldrich
nathaniel.aldrich@maine.edu

office hours: Thursday 11:30-12:30 @ IMRC 126 or by request

course materials are available for download at:
www.nbaldrich.com/IMD520-experimental-performance.html

This course is designed as a seminar for students interested in pursuing independent and group projects in experimental media or performance practices. We will work toward understanding what constitutes experimentalism in an art practice and how and why it might be employed.

Each student will create or collaborate on their own research-based project related to a particular area of interest. These projects can include creating new work, revisiting and refining previous work, or topical research in the history and theory of contemporary experimental art practices. Students will propose their projects as indicated in the syllabus below.

Students can expect to work in a critical classroom environment which will form the core of the course. Various reading, listening and viewing sessions of relevant artists and works from the canon of experimental media and performance will support and expand upon the various applications of experimentalism and how students might create unique explorations pursuant to the individual goals. Students should expect to end the term with completed work to add to their portfolio.

How the grade is constructed:

There will be three components to your grade: a finished project, an essay predicated on you reading selection, and classroom participation in the discussions.

- **Project** - Students will generate individual or group projects for this course that will constitute 50% of the final grade. The progress of these projects are to be regularly updated as indicated on the syllabus. Unfinished projects will receive only partial credit!
- **Essay** - Students will submit an essay of +/-1500 words focusing on experimentation in art vis-a-vis the text(s) of your choice (as addressed below) This will constitute 25% of the final grade. Consider your essay as an opportunity for to develop, refine and articulate some perspective, argument, critical observation or theoretical supposition regarding the nature of experimental art practices. The due date for the essay is indicated on the syllabus below; late submissions will not be accepted save for a qualifying act of God. It should be your expectation that this essay will be suitable for publication in its final draft.
- **Participation** – As this class is designed as a seminar, it is incumbent on the students to make the course go! This is an opportunity to speculate, postulate, formulate and interrogate the

concepts presented over the course of the semester in pursuit of a clearer understanding of the artists, works and techniques we considered here as 'experimental'. Without vigorous group discussion, this course will not succeed! Individual participation constitutes the final 25% of the grade.

- **Texts** - Students are asked to select a text or texts to read for this course. The text should engage the idea of experimental practice in the arts, but the choice of text is up to the individual student. If you are unsure where to look, speak to the instructor or your peers. There are lots of fantastic resources out there and one never knows where inspiration might lie. The text(s) you choose may or may not relate to your project, that is up to you. Consider it an experiment!

About the class structure:

Students should be prepared to show and discuss their projects at any time. It may be particularly valuable for students to identify problematic aspects of their individual projects and present those for group evaluation.

The screenings, listenings and readings in this course are designed to provide an historical context for current experimental music and performance practices. This history hopefully helps inform students current work through an examination of previous generations of artists whose work helps define the idea of experimental practice.

Deductions in grade points will be assigned for absences! Each student is conceded one (1) unexcused absence during the course of the semester.

Please note: Any missed assignments may or may not be made up, through late submission or alternate assignments, solely at the discretion of the instructor. Work not submitted will receive 0 points.

On electronic devices in the classroom:

Due to an escalating potential for classroom disruption, the following is the current policy for this course:

"Be here now."
- Ram Dass

Please shut your phone off prior to class time. If your phone rings or if you are found using it, it will be confiscated for the duration of the class period. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be marked as absent for that day.

If you are found to be using your laptop for *anything other than class notes*, and that includes doing your work for class during class or googling something we may be discussing, you will be asked to shut your computer off. If this occurs more than once over the course of the semester, you will be

marked as absent that day.

If this somehow creates a hardship, please come speak to me.

Classroom Expectations:

Students and instructors each play an important role in maintaining a classroom environment optimal for learning, and are expected to treat each other with respect. Class discussions require diverse opinions to be shared; please be thoughtful in sharing your perspectives and responses with one another.

Disruptive behavior is defined as any type of activity that would interrupt, in a negative manner, the normal flow of information exchange in the classroom or on the UMaine campus. Such conduct can not be tolerated as it interferes with the financial and educational investments of other students. Students that exhibit such unacceptable behavior will be asked to leave the classroom setting, and their future presence in the class will come under the review of an officer of the University.

Examples of inappropriate behavior:

- verbal or physical abuse of another person
- sexual harassment or discrimination
- threats or belligerence
- malicious destruction, damage or misuse of college property
- indecent or disorderly conduct.

Other behaviors that can be disruptive include chatting during class, preparing to leave before class is over, and/or consistently arriving late to class. The instructor will be the arbiter of what constitutes disruptive behavior.

This behavior can *negatively affect your grade!*

Use of IMRC Studios, Labs and Other Facilities:

You are encouraged to use the IMRC facilities to complete your work this semester. Access to the departmental facilities is a privilege. If there are problems - doors left unlocked, tools missing or damaged, trash everywhere, unsafe use of tools and materials - your access may be suspended.

In the Event of an Extended Disruption:

In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

Academic Honesty:

Standards of academic integrity are expected of all students. These require that students never

present the work of others as their own. Nor should the same work be turned in for more than one class. Violations will result in failing the class and other disciplinary actions. Academic dishonesty includes cheating, plagiarism and all forms of misrepresentation in academic work, and is unacceptable at The University of Maine. As stated in the University of Maine's online undergraduate "Student Handbook," plagiarism (the submission of another's work without appropriate attribution) and cheating are violations of The University of Maine Student Conduct Code.

Students with a Disabling Condition:

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require special accommodations in order to meet course requirements should notify the instructor as soon as possible with appropriate documentation and meet with the instructor to clarify and arrange what is needed. If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

Religious Holy Days:

If you expect to miss a class due to the observance of a religious holy day, you must inform the instructor, in writing, by the sixteenth day of the semester in order to make accommodations for exams or assignments.

Sexual Discrimination Reporting:

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct or any form of gender discrimination involving members of the campus, your teacher is required to report this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity. If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

- For confidential resources on campus: Counseling Center: 207-581-1392 or Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000
- For confidential resources off campus: Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000 or Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909.
- Other resources: The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:
- For support services on campus: Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406
- Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409 University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911

Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>

IMD 520
Experimental Music and Performance

9/6 Introduction – Let's Talk about Experimentalism!

What this course is about and how we will proceed, on readings, listenings and screenings; an introduction to the idea of experimental art.

9/13 Spaulding Gray

We will view Spaulding Gray's performance film *Swimming to Cambodia* and subsequently discuss how this film can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

9/20 Marina Abramovic

We will view a collection of Abramovic's performance work and talks and discuss how her work can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

9/27 Project Presentations

This class period will be dedicated to proposing the individual or group student projects. We will as a group critique the ideas as proposed and help finalize the projects.

Please come to class prepared to give a 15 minute presentation on your proposed project and participate in a peer-lead critical analysis of your project as proposed.

10/4 Phillippe Petit

We will view the film *Man on Wire* and discuss how Petit's work can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

10/11 A Primer on the Essay

Please be prepared to present the text(s) you expect to use as a predicate for your essay.

10/18 Chris Marker

We will view the film *Sans Soliel* and discuss how Marker's work can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

10/25 Project Updates

This class period will be dedicated to proposing the individual or group student projects. We will as a group critique the ideas as proposed and help finalize the projects.

Please come to class prepared to give a 15 minute status report on your project..

11/1 John Cage

We will view the film *4 American Composers: John Cage* and discuss how Cage's work can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

11/8 **Alvin Lucier**

We will listen to a variety of Lucier's work and discuss how it can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

11/15 **Christo & Jeanne-Claude**

We will view the documentary *Running Fence*, which chronicles the creation and execution of this work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and subsequently discuss how this work can be contextualized as an experimental practice.

Essays are due no later than this classroom period!

11/22 **Thanksgiving Break!**

11/29 **Final Presentations 1**

A chance to publicly present our semester's work to a waiting public!

12/6 **Final Presentations 2**

A chance to publicly present our semester's work to a waiting public!

12/13 **Post Mortem**

This class period will be an opportunity to reflect on the goals and processes that made up the course and for us to draw conclusions as a group regarding the nature of our work and experimental music and performance in general.

